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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001659

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK

P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER

NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR UNSC MARR MOPS IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MILIBAND URGES LEBANESE TO ACT ON RANGE
OF ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) British Foreign Secretary David Miliband addressed three main topics with Lebanese interlocutors in his November 18-19 visit: Syria, Iran, and the Middle East Peace Process. On Syria, he told the Lebanese that the UK is not naive and is not selling out with moves such as his trip to Damascus the day before coming to Beirut. On Iran, he urged Lebanese officials to proactively address their concerns about a conflict involving Iran by lobbying the Iranians to accept the international community's offer on the nuclear file. Most reacted skeptically including President Sleiman, who is headed to Tehran on November 24-25, but Sleiman also showed interest on that issue, taking notes and asking Miliband to provide a position paper. On the peace process, Miliband urged direct Lebanese-Israeli contacts. Sleiman's response was that he was willing if Israel complies with its full range of UNSCR obligations first. End summary.

¶2. (C) British Foreign Secretary David Miliband made a 20 hour visit to Beirut November 18-19, after a visit to Syria the day before. He met with President Sleiman, PM Siniora, majority leader Saad Hariri and FM Salloukh, spoke at the American University of Beirut, and had dinner with a politically diverse group that included Amine Gemayel and Minister Mohammed Safadi of March 14 and MP Farid el-Khazen and Minister Mohammed Khalifeh of the opposition. British DCM Chris O'Conner gave DCM and PolMilOff a readout of the visit, with additional information provided by Siniora's aide Roula Noureddine and Hariri's aide Ghattas Khoury.

SYRIA: "WE ARE NOT NAIVE"

¶3. (C) O'Conner emphasized that Miliband reassured his Lebanese interlocutors that "we are not naive" when dealing with the Syrian Government and the UK's movement on improving relations with the Syrians was "reversible," based on Syrian behavior. Miliband stressed that constructive behavior with Lebanon was one critical component of those behaviors. Miliband's November 17 trip to Damascus included a two hour session with President Asad, in which, O'Conner stated, Miliband had "a frank" conversation partially dedicated to

relations with Lebanon. He also raised with Asad Syria taking action on the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq, being helpful with Hamas and terrorism in the region and human rights cases in Syria.

IRAN: MILIBAND ASKS LEBANESE TO LOBBY IRANIANS

4.(C) O'Conner highlighted Miliband's efforts to urge Lebanese officials to voice their concerns about Iranian nuclear weapon development. Miliband asserted to Sleiman that there were no positive consequences for Lebanon if the Iranians continued unfettered in their work. The worst consequence would be Lebanon caught in the spill-over of a conflict. Most officials reacted skeptically, asserting to Miliband that an Iranian nuclear program was "priority B," with Israel's already developed nuclear program a "priority A" issue, O'Conner said. President Sleiman, who is scheduled to visit Tehran November 24-25, gave no details of his visit agenda to Miliband, O'Conner noted, but did take extensive notes and asked Miliband to provide a position paper, in a way the British interpreted as genuine interest. O'Conner commented to us that Miliband believes the West has done a poor job communicating to the international community the details of the comprehensive package of incentives proposed to the Iranians, and without such information many countries remain reluctant to speak up for a compromise on the issue.

ISRAEL: "WHY DON'T YOU TALK TO THEM?"

BEIRUT 00001659 002 OF 002

15. (C) On the peace process, Miliband urged direct Lebanese-Israeli contacts. In response to the question, "When are you going to talk to Israel?", Sleiman's response to Miliband was "hard-line," O'Conner reported. Sleiman wanted clear commitments from Israel on a full range of UNSCR obligations, stressing the stopping of overflights of Lebanese territory and territorial concessions, e.g. Ghajar and Sheba'a.

A TOUGH UNIVERSITY CROWD

16. (C) Miliband lectured before nearly 300 American University of Beirut (AUB) students and took a "grilling," over British foreign policy in the Middle East, O'Conner said. The Foreign Secretary was asked repeatedly about British policy "kowtowing" to the Bush Administration. In response, Miliband explained that Britain had led on issues such as controlling Israeli settlement growth and had advocated for a separate Palestinian state since the 1930s.

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